

## Alexander William Doniphan: Portrait of a Missouri Moderate

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pling of that topicality. His comments on the Civil War are, perhaps, historically the most compelling. A supporter of Stephen Douglas before the war, he was reviled by his enemies as a Copperhead once the struggle began. Excerpts from his wife's wartime diary for 1862 are included here, since, regrettably, Roberts's diaries for 1860-1862 are missing and perhaps no longer extant.

A brief version of what became editor J. Merton England's introduction and epilogue appeared as "A Buckeye Candide" in the June 1989 issue of *Ohio Magazine*, but the fullness of Roberts's journals and diaries are brought forward here for the first time. In doing so, England has done a great historical service. A minor caveat, however, concerns the lack of annotations and a general bibliography. Although the book is published through a university "popular press" which doubtless eliminates such trappings as a matter of editorial policy, these features would expand the context and utility of the book. General readers would benefit, for example, from explanations of problematic terms such as *butternut* (a term applied to southern sympathizers in the North and often used as a synonym for *Copperhead*) and could be directed to the principal works relating to the events chronicled in Roberts's writings. As it is, they are left to ferret out archaic usages and seek additional information on their own. Even so, this volume will long be consulted by those interested in the social fabric of the mid-western communities in which Roberts lived, worked, and wrote.

*Alexander William Doniphan: Portrait of a Missouri Moderate*, by Roger D. Launius. Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1997. xiv, 316 pp. Illustrations, maps, notes, bibliography, index. \$37.50 cloth.

REVIEWED BY THOMAS BURNELL COLBERT, MARSHALLTOWN COMMUNITY COLLEGE

On August 8, 1887, Alexander William Doniphan died. The epitaph on his tombstone read: "An Orator, Jurist, Statesman, Soldier, and a Christian" (280). It might also have said "Unappreciated War Hero and Political Moderate," or so one might surmise from reading Roger Launius's biography of Doniphan.

A respected lawyer and Whig political leader, Doniphan helped organize and eventually led the First Regiment of Mounted Missouri Volunteers during the Mexican War. As a military commander, he ultimately gained fame for his role during the conquest of New Mexico and the invasion of Mexico, especially with his lopsided victories at the battles of El Brazito and Sacramento.

Doniphan did not capitalize politically on his status as a war hero. The Missouri Whigs had an interest in promoting his candidacy for high office, but he did not. Launius concludes that a mixture of his family's needs and his desire to rebuild his law practice, coupled with the competition and disputes inherent in Missouri politics, kept Doniphan from seeking public office. The events of the day, however, did elicit responses from Doniphan. He was a pro-Union, pro-slavery (and slaveholding) Whig, an almost untenable position as Missouri and the rest of the nation slipped toward civil war. As the dispute over slavery destroyed the Whig Party, Doniphan sided with the American or Know-Nothing Party. Then in 1854 he allowed the Whigs to nominate him for United States Senator. He did not win, and by 1856 the Whig Party had essentially disappeared in Missouri. Doniphan believed in the constitutionality of slavery, and saw it appropriately protected by law, not violence. Thus he represented Missouri at the Washington Peace Conference in February 1861. When war finally came, Doniphan remained loyal to the Union, arguing that after the war reform would undo the changes brought by the Radical Republicans.

Doniphan found himself economically strapped following the war, when he became a Democrat. According to Launius, he typified those characterized as Bourbon Democrats, political conservatives interested in "industrialism, business, and economic growth" (267). Doniphan started to reestablish some wealth in large part from the sale of land he owned near Council Bluffs, Iowa, and he spent the remainder of his life as a lawyer and banker.

What can be said about Doniphan and this biography? Certainly Doniphan played a notable role in Missouri history. He was an able attorney and gifted orator who distinguished himself particularly when representing the Mormons in Jackson County in the 1830s. In his young manhood he exemplified the frontier spirit of hard work and self-promotion. Until the Civil War, Doniphan "believed fundamentally in the principle of governmental responsibility in promoting the welfare of its citizens" (73). During the war he modified his views, but he remained committed to the economic and social development of his locality. In all, he reflected the views and actions of many other moderate Whigs of the time, making him representative of many of his peers. But what distinguishes Doniphan, of course, is that he was a national hero. Because of his military achievements, he merits a modern biography. At the same time, his political life leads to intriguing questions. Why did Doniphan reject political power? Was he essentially an ordinary but capable man or a Cincinnatus in Missouri?

Roger D. Launius attempts to answer these and other questions when telling the life story of this generally forgotten man. The research underpinning the book is solid. Launius uses many primary and secondary sources to produce a readable and informative standard academic biography of the life and times of Alexander William Doniphan, whom Launius understands as a true political moderate representing what Arthur M. Schlesinger Jr. defined as the "vital center" (283).

*Frank Blair: Lincoln's Conservative*, by William E. Parrish. Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1998. xv, 318 pp. Illustrations, notes, bibliography, index. \$29.95 cloth.

REVIEWED BY WALLACE HETTLE, UNIVERSITY OF NORTHERN IOWA

William E. Parrish's biography of Frank Blair traces the life of a Missouri politician whose career raises fascinating questions about the Civil War era. Blair served as a Democratic Party operative in the antebellum period, worked as a Republican leader when the approaching Civil War shook Missouri politics, became an effective Union general, and left the Republicans during Reconstruction because he believed Congress to be too radical on racial issues.

Frank Blair, by today's standards, is not a particularly appealing fellow, especially because he sided with the racist politics of Andrew Johnson during Reconstruction. Yet Parrish refuses to judge Blair by late twentieth-century principles, and casts him as a sympathetic character. The multiple references to Blair as "Frank" in the text are probably designed to avoid confusion between Blair and other members of his politically active family, but they also may show that Parrish, like so many biographers, developed a nearly affectionate understanding of his subject.

Parrish has done enormous work in the archives, newspapers, and other primary sources. Moreover, his expertise in Missouri's political history is unsurpassed. This is the definitive life of Frank Blair, and the bibliography and notes are well worth consulting for anyone interested in nineteenth-century Missouri history. Missouri was a peculiar state during the Civil War era, with its combination of diehard boosters of slavery and passionate Republicans such as Blair. In emphasizing the machinations of Missouri's political elite, rather than political culture, campaigns, and voting behavior, Parrish implicitly draws a picture of a state where the elites set the political agenda. His description of the political process is a splendid antidote to the vast body of

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